

Metanoia: Willingness to Repent**Luke 13:31-35****March 13, 2022****The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings**

31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." **32**He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. **33**Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' **34**Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! **35**See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Are you a hugger? Do you like to give and receive hugs? I guess some people are and others aren't. And it's not always easy to figure out who is and who isn't. When we were in Europe a few years ago, I noticed that people always greeted each other the same way, they would hold each other in a half-hug, sort of by the upper arms, and they would kiss each other, first on one cheek, then the other, then back to the first one. Always three kisses, kisses that didn't really touch their cheek, just sort of alongside. Not a full hug, not a real kiss, but everyone did the same way so I guess they didn't have to worry about how much to hug or whether to kiss on the cheek or the air right next to the cheek. It was social convention and already decided. How do you decide? When you greet someone on the street—do you shake hands? Hug? Kiss on the cheek? When someone comes to your house, is it different? Do you hug all the friends who come into your house? How about at church? How do you greet people here? Especially these days, have you stopped hugging? Do you still shake hands? Or do you throw in a fist bump or touch elbows, or do you just wave from an appropriate 6 feet away? Or do you still hug? But how do you know if someone doesn't want a hug? Have you ever tried to hug someone and the person backed away? I mean other than one of your kids in a public place when you try to hug them and they just say, "Daaaaaad . . ." But what about someone else? Have you ever tried to hug someone and

been rebuffed? You might have even been excited to hug them, smile on your face, arms outstretched, until you saw the flinch on their face, until they backed away. How did you feel? You feel like you have offered your love, offered something of yourself and been turned down? Don't you think that's how Jesus felt? He comes to this point in his journey toward Jerusalem and he knows that it is not going to go well for him. He also knows that it won't go well for Jerusalem either. They are headed for a downfall, for eventual destruction, and they will do nothing to stop it. And so he weeps over Jerusalem. As Barbara Brown Taylor says about this passage: "If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, then you understand the depth of Jesus' lament. All you can do is open your arms. You cannot make anyone walk into them. Meanwhile, this is the most vulnerable posture in the world --wings spread, breast exposed -- but if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand." This is Jesus the hen, Jesus trying to protect his chicks, Jesus trying to protect those whom he loves. But how do we respond to God? Do we let ourselves be enveloped in his wings? Do we trust him that much? Are we willing?

This season of Lent we are talking about "Metanoia." You may remember that is the Greek word for "repentance." But metanoia means more than to feel sorry for something that we've done. It actually means to turn around, to change directions, to find a new way. But as Jesus discovered, to find a new way, or to change the way we've been going, takes a willingness to change.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I long to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings?" "How I long, how I long." This is the voice of God's longing, of God's seeking, of God's searching love and mercy. But there is a problem here and Jesus recognized it, too. In spite of God coming to God's people, in spite of the longing, the searching, in spite of God's continual offering of love and mercy, in spite of all of these things, people resist and even reject God and the promises brought by God.

And Jesus knew that. He knew about the prophets of old who had come to Jerusalem same as he was, and had been stoned and murdered. He also knew that human hearts could be as cold and hard as stone, that we can reject even what we know is good, that we can push God away. He had experienced it in his own journey to Jerusalem. He offered love, love that many received, but also love that so many resisted and rejected.

James Lemler, Episcopal pastor in Greenwich CT says about this passage, “It is a pattern as old as the human heart. The Hebrew Scriptures are full of stories of resistance and rejection.

(Remember that 40-year sojourn in the wilderness? Remember the reception that the prophets got time after time?) Goodness, remember the story of Adam and Eve in the garden? God loves them, God comes to them in the cool of the morning, but they have resisted and rejected the love of God.

What a pattern: God seeking us, God longing for us. Sometimes we accept and receive.

Sometimes we resist and reject. Thus, we come to the pattern of our own lives and to Scripture's message for this Second Sunday of Lent. It really is one, two, three.

One - God comes to us.

Two - Sometimes, sometimes we resist and reject that love.

Three - God comes to us.

I don't understand the resistance in my own soul or the rejection that is exhibited within my own heart or the heart of others. But I know that it is there. I know that I resist the love, that we reject the invitation.¹ Our resistance as human beings takes many forms; just watch the news to see some of them, dependence on worldly power, trust in wealth or fame, or let's look in our own

¹ Lemler, James. *Day 1. God Longs for Us. March 4, 2007*

hearts--anger, resentment, despair, bitterness, vengeance, I could go on. We human beings do it; we resist, we reject. We are unwilling to repent, to change, to take another way.

But still God comes, still God invites, still God seeks us, longs for us, weeps for us, wants us to come home. It is simply the heart and character of God to do these things, for God to long to gather us as a hen gathers her chicks, as a mother holds her own beloved children. God invites us to that embrace.

We are invited to sit, to rest, to abide in God's love and embrace. The invitation is to recognize the coming of God to us, to perceive the longing, seeking and searching of God. It is the invitation to hear in a new and fresh way the promises of God and of God's love for us. We are invited to move beyond our fear, beyond our own resistance or shame or guilt or rejection; to move beyond these things to the love, to the grace, to the forgiveness, to the mercy of God.

The words spoken by Jesus as he saw Jerusalem are also deeply personal words for you and for me. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How I longed for you. How often have I desired to gather you to myself." But are we willing? During this Lent, especially this Lent after two years of this pandemic and we think things are now getting back to normal, what if God doesn't want us to go back? What if God wants to take us somewhere new? Are we stuck in the past, in wanting to do things the way we used to? A new way of doing things—a new way of being. Are we willing to turn around, to repent, to go somewhere new?

God longs for us. God desires to gather us. God seeks us. God calls us home.